PGA Leadership: Raising the Bar for 2014

Postdoctoral and Graduate Student Association (PGA) elections for Chairs, Committee Chairs, and the recently established posts of Treasurer and Webmaster were held in December.

We would like to commend the hard work and dedication of the 2013 leaders: Hilary Eaton and Tobias Otto (PGA Co-Chairs); Tony Barnitz and Reina Improgo (Retreat Committee Co-Chairs); Hilary Eaton and Monica Ter-Minassian (Newsletter Committee Co-Chairs); Juliann Chmielecki, Ute Burkhardt and Leah Hogdal & Alison Taylor (successive Seminars Committee (Co-)Chairs); and Tobias Otto and Lijun Liu (successive Social Committee Chairs).

Last year, these leaders and their highly dedicated committees worked with the PGSAO to bring substantial changes and improvements to the postdoc and graduate student community: they increased awareness of PGA initiatives at postdoc orientations and other events; inspired more postdocs to join the PGA; increased attendance and participation at the Annual PGA Retreat and poster session; recruited postdocs to write for the PGA Post, and doubled the newsletter circulation. Through the monthly Brain Lunch seminar series, they invited accomplished postdoc speakers and DFCI Research Core representatives to speak about their work. They encouraged DFCI postdocs to socialize at organized events on and off campus, including musical concerts, an ice-skating excursion, and a baking contest. They established a Benefits Advocacy Group to advocate for improved postdoctoral benefits and salaries. They also proposed a PGA budget for the 2014 fiscal year.

In 2014, Tony Barnitz and Reina Improgo are stepping up to lead the PGA: their mission is to improve the training experience of postdocs and grad students, and to take forward projects that the PGA is currently working on. As the new Treasurer, Jennifer Spangle will manage the PGA budget. Jennifer will also serve as Co-Chair of the Retreat Committee alongside Michaela Gruber; they are excited about planning a amazing retreat to celebrate the PGSAO’s 10th anniversary! Monica Ter-Minassian will continue as Co-Chair for the Newsletter Committee, along with Siddha Kasar: they plan on developing new ways to promote postdoc interaction with the newsletter, including a reader comments section, puzzles, and survey questions. Leah Hogdal and Alison Taylor will remain on as leaders of the Seminars Committee; they will pilot new seminar formats such as sessions on practicing elevator pitches, and possibly even a journal club. Lukas Baitsch takes on the post of Webmaster and, along with Anne Fassl, will serve as Social Committee Co-Chair; they plan to improve work-life balance and intercultural exchange by promoting fun social events.

The new leadership and current members invite interested postdocs and grad students with enthusiasm and innovative ideas to join us in our efforts.

Learn more about the new PGA leaders at http://www.dfcionline.org/departments/pgsao/pga/leadership.aspx
Cooking up a Mentoring Experience

On a cold December evening, after a packed day of experiments, the Frank Laboratory trekked to Newton Highlands for dinner together. Instead of a typical lab outing at a restaurant, we set out to be chefs with our PI David Frank. We met with Head Chef Donna at Create-A-Cook in Newton. After donning our personal protective wear, we went to work on different projects, dutifully following assigned protocols. Some projects were simple, like putting together a leafy green salad, while others, such as pasta rolling, required team effort. After about two hours of meticulous measuring, precise cutting, and careful use of lab equipment (mixers, fryers, pasta makers, ovens, etc.), we allowed our various creations to incubate. The final result was not a pristine western blot, but a four-course North End-themed dinner that we all sat down and enjoyed together. Overall, we conquered the tasks of making Herb and Parmesan Foccacia, Green Salad, Truffle Polenta French Fries with Spicy Aioli, Cannelloni with Spinach and Ricotta, and Cannolis for dessert. Most importantly, we were extremely satisfied with the final result of all the projects. “The cooking experience was a lot like the laboratory. Each person had their individual project, but when we all worked collaboratively to complete them, the result was really special,” said David Frank.

Why did we spend the evening cooking dinner together under the guidance of a chef? Last September, Dr. Frank was awarded the Mentor-of-the-Year award by the postdoctoral fellows and graduate students at DFCI. Along with the honor and recognition, Dr. Frank was also presented with a monetary award to support mentoring activities. Cooking together at Create-A-Cook used this award and created a fun experience for all of us to remember. “Cooking a meal together was a great team building exercise. We each had our own strengths and weaknesses in the various areas of cooking. Therefore, we each took a hand at mentoring each other in various aspects of cooking,” said graduate student Jennifer Yeh. Another lab member, Yasmin Kroll, said “I enjoyed being encouraged to choose stations that we would find challenging. Just like in a lab setting, we should always try to push ourselves to learn new things. Especially when those things are dipped in chocolate…” What better way to work together towards a mutual goal, when that goal ends with cannolis!

Mentoring advice

“A mentor gives an important gentle nudge to help the mentee navigate the challenges of a new recipe, a research project, or a career path.” —David Frank

The members of the Frank laboratory survey their finished products. Members include (from left to right): Suhu Liu, Patricia Toniolo, Jennifer Yeh, David Frank, Sarah Walker, Vida Vafaizadeh, and Yasmin Kroll.
Consulting as an Alternative Career

Consultants are experts from a variety of fields that work together with organizations to identify problems, provide advice, and propose solutions. Companies may turn to consulting firms for help with increasing their sales/revenues or reducing their costs; developing strategies for growth, pricing, or operations; entering a new market; or turning around their business. In addition to hiring MBAs, consulting firms also recruit students and graduates with advanced degrees (PhDs, MDs, and JDs) because of their field-specific expertise and aptitude for problem solving. Consultants have the opportunity to travel and learn more about business strategy, and they may even have a lasting impact on industry leaders. While the salaries and perks are very generous, it is worth mentioning that the hours can be even more demanding than those of a scientist!

If you are thinking about transitioning from academic science to a career in consulting, the first step is to decide what type of consulting firm you would like to join. The Boston area is home to many boutique and medium-sized firms that specialize in healthcare and life sciences consulting, such as ClearView Healthcare Partners and L.E.K. Alternatively, if you are ready to branch out beyond science into fields such as retail or finance, you may decide that a large generalist firm – such as McKinsey, Boston Consulting Group, or Bain – would be a better fit for you.

Once you decide on the type of firm you want to target, your next step is to prepare for the consulting interview process, which is quite difficult. After passing the initial resume screen and phone interview, you can expect to undergo a series of in-person interviews that have a more structured format, including a problem-solving test, a personal experience evaluation, and a case interview. These components test your creativity and ability to work as part of a team, as well as your quantitative skills and business acumen.

To learn more about consulting, join the Harvard Graduate Consulting Club (HGCC), which provides access to a wide range of consulting resources, networking events, workshops, and case competitions http://www.harvardgraduateconsultingclub.com.

The HGCC also holds weekly sessions in the LMA and in Cambridge, at which you can find a partner and practice cases.

Additional resources:
2. Case In Point, by Marc Cosentino
3. The Ten-Day MBA, by Steven Silbiger

Science Exchange: Outsourcing Scientific Experiments

Ever wondered if you could outsource your experiments or use payment-based methods for services of collaborators with scientific expertise that complement yours? Well, this is now possible with the help of an online marketplace for scientific collaborations called “Science Exchange”. The service uses market-based incentives to facilitate scientific collaborations within the research community.

At Science Exchange, one can choose services like microarray, molecular cloning, sequencing etc., from a range of service providers that include academic institutions as well as private parties. It is often referred to as being as simple as ordering stuff from Ebay, except that now it is a scientific Ebay. When you search for a service, the system provides you with a list of providers and you can compare service pricing, turnaround time, past client feedback and recommendations of expert service providers at core research and commercial facilities. The ratings by previous users facilitate the choice of trustworthy services by new users. To make the process more user-friendly, Science Exchange even takes care of billing. Science Exchange handles financial transactions with service providers at a nominal charge of 5%.

Many institutes also include Science Exchange on their list of Approved Vendors in purchasing systems (like Peoplesoft and SciQuest). The transparent nature of the financial exchange has led to participation by core facilities of many academic institutes, including those at Harvard Medical School and Dana-Farber, in the Science Exchange marketplace. Including the service provider in the resulting publication is at the sole discretion of the requester; one can also negotiate their service terms in order to accommodate intellectual property rights.

Science Exchange also acts as a platform to independently validate or authenticate research projects: with the NIH considering the addition of experimental validation conditions for grant applications, outsourcing parts of your project for third party validation by Science Exchange providers can be really helpful. The entry of an online scientific marketplace for experiments is definitely going to bring about a shift in the way science is done in the future. www.scienceexchange.com

Research Computing

Research Computing supports the computing needs of Dana-Farber’s research community in a broad variety of ways, from basic infrastructure to sophisticated analysis pipelines. At the most basic level, we provide desktop and smartphone support; purchase consultation for Macs and other non-standard computers; NFS and Windows storage for labs and individuals; and big data storage for nextGen sequencing data, microscopy images, and more. We manage group licenses for an array of software, such as Endnote, Graphpad/PRISM, Matlab, SAS, Vector NTI, Sequencher, and DNA-Star. We also support many free software offerings such as Galaxy, UCSC Genome Browser, and a host of applications on our compute cluster and applications server. We maintain a number of services available to the Dana-Farber research community at no cost: an HPC cluster for computational biology; a server for secure file transfers; desktop and laptop backups via Retrospect, Crashplan, and Networker; and web site hosting on servers and virtual machines. If you’d like to see the complete list of our support and service offerings, check out our website:

http://research4.dfci.harvard.edu/content/services

Email: Matthew Temple at support@mail.dfci.harvard.edu

PGA Calendar

**February 21, 2014** – Brain Lunch with Akinyemi Ojesina, M.D., Ph.D.
*Time:* 12:00 – 1:00 PM
*Location:* Smith 308/309

**March 4, 2014** – What Search Committees Look for in a Faculty Candidate, by Nathanael Gray, Ph.D. & Annick Van den Abbeele, M.D.
*Time:* 3:00 – 4:30 PM
*Location:* JF 836A/B

**March 18, 2014** – RCR Lecture on Mentoring by Barrett Rollins, M.D., Ph.D.
*Time:* 2:00 – 3:30 PM
*Location:* Smith 308/309


Crossword

**Down**

1. PGSAO administrator: Jennifer ____
2. New England NFL team
3. Number of DFCI-based core facilities
5. Research started in 1978 to sequence human genes
8. Initial founder of modern day DFCI
12. Winner of the 2013 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine
14. Official sponsor of birthdays (initials)
16. DFCI is missing this floor
19. Largest US art theft occurred in this Boston-based museum (initials)

**Across**

4. Boston Red Sox second baseman
6. Number of Harvard alumni that signed the Declaration of Independence
7. Host of NPR’s “Science Friday”
9. DFCI’s core values include: impact, excellence, compassion and ...
10. Yoga is offered at this DFCI center
11. U.S.S. Constitution’s nickname
13. Current DFCI president
15. Green fluorescent protein was isolated from this species of jellyfish
17. Official Massachusetts state dessert
18. Paul Revere’s medical profession
20. NIH Director

Answers can be found online at [http://www.dfcionline.org/departments/pgsao/pga/post/](http://www.dfcionline.org/departments/pgsao/pga/post/)